

# POSSUM HUNTING

## THE OLD AND NEW IN VIRGINIA.

In the good old days of long ago I was something of an artist at 'possum hunting, but I had not happened in the woods at night for a long, long time. Being out in the country one day last week and enjoying the scenes presented by the autumn tints on the foliage, I commenced to think of old 'possum hunting days. My mind went back to the time when I was young and risky and never lost an opportunity to go out with two faithful negro men, Davey and George. In those old days we had an idea that only the young and inexperienced 'possum trapper, on moonlight nights, and, therefore, our favorite time for chasing, trailing and capturing this gly "varmint" was on the dark of the moon. Electric lights were unknown in those days, kerosene oil was not plentiful, and our source of light was the old-time lightwood knot. The equipment for a night's sport at 'possum hunting consisted then of a gunny sack, filled with lightwood knots, a sharp axe, and, of course, a pint bottle, filled with that which always cheered but never intoxicated, and a few other things. After two or three 'possums had been chased and caught the gunny sack was partially emptied of lightwood knots and was used then as a receptacle for the captives. The Virginian who has not enjoyed an old-time 'possum hunt has lived to poor purpose.

AS IT WAS.

Every Virginian doubtless remembers a "Davy" and a "George" and the gunny sack of lightwood knots, and also the faithful old dogs, "Rine" and "Traller" and "Shylock" and "Ball" and what not. 'Possum hunting was not all sport. There was a great deal of work about it. We not only climbed the hills, waded the creeks and even scaled the mountain sides, but we had to cut down big trees to secure the 'possum, and sometimes dig deep in the earth when one was "treed" in his den at the roots of some old blown-down tree. But there was fun enough to pay for all this work and this trouble.

AN OLD TIMER.

Many years ago, so many in fact, I could not think of giving a date, I was on my last old time 'possum hunt, and it was a hunt that was strictly business. However, it was a sample of many others, several hundred, perhaps, that I had grown up upon, and I will tell about it briefly right in this connection. There were four young white men in the party, two able-bodied negro men, four dogs, two sharp axes and the inevitable gunny sack filled with lightwood knots and the other necessary auxiliaries. Among the latter may be enumerated a black bottle, a peck of sweet potatoes, a pound of cheese, a paper bag of crackers and a loaf or two of bread. These latter were for lunch when we should grow tired.

MIDNIGHT LUNCH.

A lunch on a 'possum hunt, away off in the woods at the dead of night. It is the most enjoyable meal that mortal man ever sat down to.

The way to go about it is, or was in the olden days, to gather around a big log in the dense woods, make a fire, first of immense proportions, roast the potatoes, toast the cheese, heat the loaf bread and then square yourself for a square meal. Of course, you have walked miles, perhaps, cut down several trees before this night meal in the forest is ready, and as consequence you have the appetite of a harvest hand, and the digestion of an ostrich. Mr. Rockefeller could get such a lunch for much less than a million dollars, and yet they say that is the amount he is willing to pay for a square meal that he can enjoy and digest.

But, to return to this ancient 'possum hunt: We had started out with poor luck, and lunch time had come before old "Jowler" or "Dido" had struck a trail. Gloomily we disposed of the lunch and at about 1 o'clock resumed business. Four trails, one right after the other, four "trees," four great oaks felled, four extra chases and four tremendous 'possums in the bag and all the work finished just as the gray dawn was making its mark in the eastern sky.

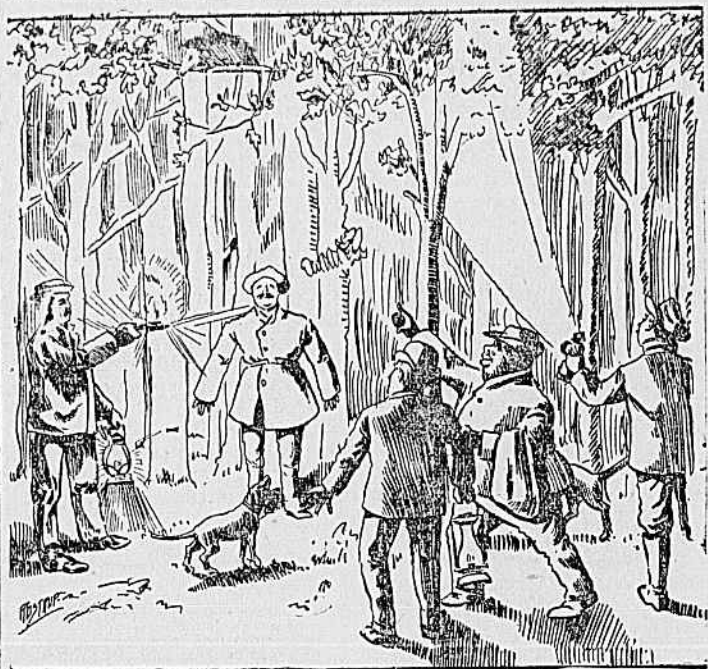
TOP HEAVY, BUT HAPPY.

A tired and worn-out crowd; certainly it was, for we had not waded creeks, climbed hills, fallen into gullies, tumbled over blown-down trees, pulled through briar patches, untangled ourselves from bamboo environment, fallen over cliffs, scratched our faces with overhanging boughs, made connection with our eyes with unlooked for projecting limbs of trees and barked our shins against stumps that were not on the map. But we were all happy, intensely happy. Was there ever a crowd to leave the woods at daylight with four fat 'possums in the gunny sack that was not as happy as the little birds that were then announcing with their sweet chirping, the dawning of another bright and beautiful autumn day. Of course, we were happy, as we always were after such a catch, and yet such a one was not unusual. We were many 'possums in the woods in those days, the country was not scared and defaced with barbed wire fences, we could run and fall and tumble as we might, lightwood knots were as plentiful

almost as the leaves on the trees, negro boys were artistic with the axe, dogs were well trained and had voices that awakened the echoes, and while there was a great deal of work about it and many shins were barked in the rush and scramble over gullies, hills and through dense woods, that was as dark as Egypt during the prevalence of those misty that old King Pharaoh had to cut with a knife to make his way through, there was also a lot of fun in it.

A LONGING.

There never was a Virginia boy, who once got a taste of the old-time 'possum hunt, who did not at some time in his old age long to hear "Jowler" and "Dido" and "Traller" and "Shylock" once again and crave to once more, before crossing over the river, see the tree fall and the fat 'possum surrender to the gunny sack. I had that kind of a feeling as the fall days came along this year, but I thought



"DAR HE."

there could be no more of it for me, for somehow I had conceived an idea that 'possum hunting in Virginia had taken its place on the shelf with all the others of the lost arts.

POLK MILLER TO THE RESCUE.

Whenever I feel scruffy and tired with this rapid and so-called progressive age and my mind gets to wandering back to the good old times and the good old ways that have departed, perhaps to come no more, even if history is charged with having a way of repeating itself occasionally, I go to Polk Miller, who, as we all know is a kind of ancient landmark, and I find a great deal of comfort and real happiness in mingling my tears with his as we weep over our own and our



THE OLD TIMER.

country's departed glory. Thus it happened that I told you of my views on the opinion recorded above that it was a lost art in old Virginia.

FOUND AGAIN.

"Lost art," he said, "it may have been lost, but we have rediscovered it up in Chesterfield county. We have not only reinstated it, but we have put on modern improvements. Why you talk like a dead man, you do. 'Possum huntin' is not a

lost art. It is up to date and keeping pace with the times. Don't you talk to me about your lightwood knots. Of course, 'ketchin' 'possums by a lightwood knot is a lost art and it ought to be. Up in Chesterfield we have caught on to modern progress, we have, and we have applied it to 'possum huntin' too, and don't you fail to remember that. Lightwood knots be hanged; you want to see me light up a tree and a 'possum with calcium and acetylene."

That kinder hit me like the first mint julep struck the Kentuckian, as the dawn of a new revolution, and I made further enquiry.

To make a long story short, Polk Miller invited me to go to his beautiful country home at Bon Air and take with him, a fourth of his genuine negro quartette and a few other friends a twentieth cen-



"DAR HE."

tury 'possum hunt and I accepted the invitation.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

Mr. Miller had arranged everything when I reached the pretty little village of Bon Air, nestled among the hickory trees, the chestnut oaks, and famed by the stately pines growing on the granite hills that run up abruptly from the bottom of the James, and a jolly good party it was that he had assembled. As well as I recollect, the following were the dramatic personae: Polk Miller, Rev. Mr. Hardy, J. Harvey Blair, Julien Snyder, Ran. Moore, Howard Coleman, Joe Cooke, Mr. Curtis, The Times-Dispatch lightning artist and the writer of these few lines; also Jesse Wilson, the champion colored 'possum hunter of Chesterfield; Anderson Eppes, the weighty man of Polk Miller's quartette, and Ben, the vigorous wielder of the axe. Three other important characters need to be mentioned here. They were "Old Bob," a spotted hound, with a bass profundo voice; "Blaze," a lean, lank black dog, that is reliability itself in the matter of "trailing" and "treeling," and "Rine," the ambitious puppy that has just made his debut, and tackles anything that gets on the ground, from a flying squirrel up to a forty-mile-a-minute red fox. Can't this crowd wake up the echoes in old Chesterfield and stir the "varmint" according to the new twentieth century rules?

MODERN METHODS.

The woods cling very closely around Bon Air, and we were but a little while getting into the densest part of them. Every man was equipped with a lantern, and the artist, in addition, had an acetylene gas lamp, that startled little Joe Cooke, because, as he said, it made a bright light out of branch water and little chips of granite. I noticed that Polk Miller carried some small round boxes and a small paddle made from the top of a cigar box in his side pocket. I did not know what this meant at the first, but when old "Blaze" (reed for the first time) found out, as shall hereinafter appear, as the lawyers say.

We had hardly gotten into the famous "Rattlesnake" plantation when old "Bob" opened up in vigorous style. "Blaze" found him quickly, and the puppy got as busy as a hen with thirteen chickens on a showery spring day. The "trail" was a warm one, and it took us through swamps, bamboo thickets, over hills, across gullies here, there and everywhere, and so far, with the exception of the bright lanterns in the place of the old lightwood knot, I saw nothing that differed very materially from the old-time 'possum hunt, but when we "treed," as soon "Bob" and "Blaze" did, and the puppy consented, the twentieth century business came into play.

CALCIUM LIGHT EFFECTS.

The dogs treed up a small cypress, or, more properly speaking, up a little grove of small saplings. In the olden time we would have cut down quite a forest before we could have gotten that 'possum, but when we did these twentieth century artists do? Polk Miller got out his paddle, put some reddish colored powder on it and struck a match to it, while Rostrop, the artist, focused his acetylene gas lamp upon the overhanging branches, and behold, there was not a part of those sapplings that were not in plain view of us all as we stood with heads upturned and searched the illuminated boughs and branches for the terrified 'possum, which had never had such a Fourth of July celebration before in his young life, and will never have again.

"DAR HE."

Everybody looked up the trees as Miller's calcium blazed, and not a word was said for three minutes perhaps, when old man Jesse sung out in a kind of fog-horn voice: "Dar he." We all looked where Uncle Jesse and Anderson Eppes were pointing, and there, on an overhanging bough, we saw a twenty pound 'possum, grinning and winking waw in the thunderation, so to speak, all this illumination and hubbub was about. His 'possumship soon found out, for quickly the sapling was cut down and Mr. Blair, the fat man of the party, who up to this time had used a long stick to aid him ponderously over the hills and dunes, threw away his cane, fell into the lap of the tree, and with the help of old "Blaze" and the puppy towed the 'possum into the gunny sack.

THE OLD AND THE NEW.

I must confess that the new system of 'possum hunting in old Virginia has some decided advantages over the old. The

calcium lights are a marked improvement, and if Polk Miller hasn't taken out a patent on it I think I will. The light confuses the 'possum and makes him run about on the limbs of the tree after the manner of the squirrel, and there is no such thing as mistaking his whereabouts or cutting down the wrong tree. In addition, the calcium flame lights up the foliage and the trees, thus makes a charming scene that is worth a long and even a tiresome tramp to see. Twentieth century 'possum hunting in old Virginia is simply bully, and I like it.

The hunt did not end here, not by a jugful. We traveled on and found that the woods were full of them. We caught three others—one in its den; another on the ground, and the last and fourth we ran up a chestnut oak tree, and as the calcium light made the whole scene as bright as day, little Joe Cooke, who has played base-ball a good deal and can throw a stone as true as a bullet, rocked the "varmint" out of the branches and we did not have to sacrifice the beautiful chestnut oak.

As I before intimated, the new method

of 'possum hunting is all right, and he who hereby admits it is something of an old fogy, too, as well as being "powerfully set" in his notions about the superiority of old time methods and things. P. S. W.

CARRIED BACK

Frenchy Leffard to Stand Trial in Rochester.

Detective McGuire, of Rochester, N. Y., returned to that city yesterday morning with "Frenchy" Leffard, the man arrested here by Sergeant Kerse as taking part in a murder at that place.

After a delightful visit of three months to her sister, Mrs. Louis C. Denim, of Milwaukee, Wis., Miss Madeline Kraus returned to her home, No. 204 Jefferson Place.

## SACRED CONCERTS AT WEST END PARK

Two Will Be Given There To-Day—Parks in Fine Shape.

The two sacred concerts to be played by Iardella's Band this afternoon and evening, at the West-End Electric Park, promises to be of unusual interest to music lovers from the fact that the programme will be made up entirely of selections requested and that three of the pieces will be from compositions of a Richmond lady. These three pieces have lately just been orchestrated by Prof. Iardella and while they have only been heard at three concerts, they have already gained considerable popularity. The names of them are "Sleepy Song," "Cradle Song" and "Separation."

In addition to the foregoing the programme will include the following selections:

March, Criterion, Noelker.  
Overture, Orpheus aux Enfers, Offenbach.  
The Lost Chord, Sullivan.  
Grand Selection, The Army Chaplain, Melloker.  
Gottus, from Messe Solenne, Gounod.  
National Polish Danse, Scharwenka.  
Finale, from Arlele, Bach.  
Suite de Ballet, Antony and Cleopatra, in the Arbor, Danse of the Nubians, Mennet, Antony's Victory.  
Grand March, Gruenwald.  
The Last Hope, a religious meditation, Gottschalk.  
Waltz, Artist's Life, Strauss.  
Comet Solo, Infamatus, from Stabat Mater, Rossini.

In addition to these several other classical selections will be added.  
Every afternoon between 2 and 4 o'clock Jack Talley, keeper of the Lakeside Zoo, feeds the hundreds of animals under his charge. Every animal from the African lionesses and their cubs, for the baby lions now have their share of raw meat daily, to the baby monkey, receives the personal attention of Mr. Talley.

It is one of the greatest sights of the park to see him handle and pet "Eva" and Caroline, the two huge African lions and a strong bond of affection is exhibited by these ferocious beasts for their keeper. At present the only enemy Mr. Talley has among his large animal family is the father and mother of the baby monkey. They heartily resent Mr. Talley's efforts to make friends with them or their baby.

The ride to the greatest sights of the park is one of the most pleasant of the many suburban rides offered on the trolley lines at this season of the year. The cars pass some of the finest suburban homes located around Richmond. An opportunity is also given for prospective suburbanites to look over some of the best home sites around Richmond.

After leaving Barton Heights the tracks at this season are lined on both sides with golden rod, which grows luxuriantly. The popular walk over the Belt Line

bridge from the Reservoir to Forest Hill Park offers many inducements now in the way of goldenrod and autumn leaves.

A CANDIDATE FOR JUDGE NICOLS' SHOES

(Special to The Times-Dispatch.)

WARRENTON, VA., Oct. 3.—The report current that Judge C. E. Nichol is soon to resign the judgeship of the Sixteenth Judicial Circuit, is received with general regret here by the legal fraternity. In the event of his retirement Mr. J. A. C. Keith, of this place, will receive the unanimous support of the Warrenton bar, as well as the solid legislative delegation from Fauquier.

Mr. Keith is a nephew of Judge James Keith, president to the Court of Appeals. He is an able young jurist and will receive great credit upon the position, if honored with the appointment.

Game Withdrawn.

(Special to The Times-Dispatch.)

LEXINGTON, VA., Oct. 3.—Danville Military Academy canceled the foot-ball game with Virginia Military Institute this afternoon.

CHANGE OF SCHEDULE

Southern Railway, October 4th.

Beginning with Sunday, October 4th, noon train, No. 13, limited, for all points south, will leave Richmond at 12:30 P. M. (noon), instead of 12:40 as heretofore. No other change in time of departure of trains from Richmond.

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